The Honorable Dianne Feinstein

United States Senate

Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Alex Padilla

United States Senate

Washington, D.C. 20510

November XX, 2021

Dear Senators Feinstein & Padilla:

We write in support of Amendments 4089 and 4215 to the Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, designed to strengthen protections for National Conservation Lands in the California Desert, and increase protections for over one million acres of federal public lands, and defense resources throughout the state. Your amendments will protect California’s iconic landscapes, provide critical access to open space for communities, support California’s outdoor recreation economy, and fight the climate crisis.

The Department of the Interior is an important neighbor to the Department of Defense installations, particularly in California by managing public lands that surround them. For example, representatives of the Department of Defense participated in a decade-long process with the State of California, the Department of the Interior and other stakeholders to create a plan for conservation and energy development that addressed military concerns, known as the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP). In coordination with development of the DRECP, and pursuant to statutory mandates, the Bureau of Land Management designated areas in close proximity to Department of Defense facilities in the Southwest Range Complex to be managed for conservation and others for renewable energy.

Unfortunately, former Interior Secretary David Bernhardt attempted to turn back conservation progress in the desert when he issued guidance to the BLM that put 4 million acres of conservation lands in the desert at risk by allowing development within their boundaries, something BLM had rightly prohibited until then. While then-Sec. Bernhardt went against the letter and spirit of the law, his direction to the BLM created confusion and controversy.

Fortunately, Amendment 4089 will make it absolutely clear the California Desert Conservation Lands are off-limits to development so their underlying environmental values will be protected. The Amendment will also ensure that no future Interior Secretary or BLM Director will put these lands at risk.

Further, Amendment 4215 would provide lasting protections for California’s abundant biodiversity, support clean drinking water, protect tribal cultural sites, and limit mineral other industrial activities on these undeveloped lands. The amendment would support the protection of critical defense infrastructure with upfront wildland fire management planning, providing for improved fire-planning, appropriate fuels management, develop shared fuelbreaks, and help develop more fire-resilient forests on our public lands.

Thank you again for your leadership in protecting California’s iconic public lands. We look forward to working with you the ensure these Amendments becomes law.

Sincerely,

California Native Plant Society

CalWild

Conservation Lands Foundation

Friends of the Desert Mountains

Sierra Club Tahquitz Group Chapter

The Wildlands Conservancy